# **JULY/AUGUST 2006**

TRANSPORTATION NEWS FOR THE NINE-COUNTY SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



## Mineta Steps Down From the U.S. Department Of Transportation



San Jose councilmember and mayor, California congressman, corporate executive and U.S. secretary of transportation. The venerable Norman Y. Mineta — known as "Norm" to most — has worn all these hats. and now is entering yet another career phase

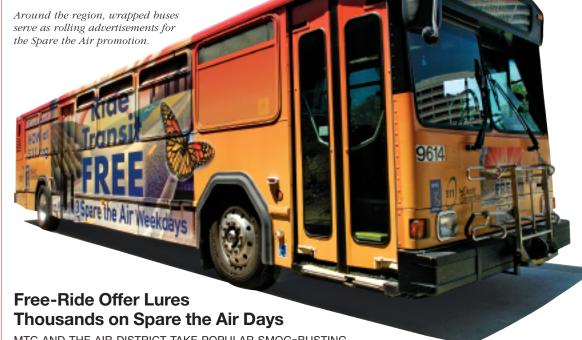
On July 7, Mineta resigned from his post as U.S. secretary of transportation and head of the federal Department of Transportation (DOT) at the age of 74 after serving a five-year stint under President George Bush. He is joining Hill & Knowlton as vice-chairman of their Global Communications Consultancy.

"The nation has greatly benefited from having someone of Norm's caliber and expertise heading the DOT, and the Bay Area has been extremely fortunate to have a hometown guy in this pivotal post in D.C.," said MTC Executive Director Steve Heminger.

As chair of the House Surface Transportation Subcommittee, Mineta played a central role in drafting and winning passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, which revolutionized how regions like the Bay Area can spend federal funding. But Mineta likely will be best remembered in transportation circles for his quick action and steadiness during and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In his letter of resignation, Mineta said he was proud of his agency's response to the crisis, "from bringing thousands of civilian flights to safe landings in a few hours, to designing, creating and staffing the Transportation Security Agency in less than a year." - Brenda Kahn

Posing in front of the truck are descendants of two people considered "fathers" of the Interstate Highway System: Merrill Eisenhower Atwater (left), greatgrandson of Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Andrew Firestone (right), great-grandson of Harvey Firestone, founder of Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, Representing the military, which also played a role in conceiving the Interstate System, is U.S. Army Colonel David McClean (middle).



MTC AND THE AIR DISTRICT TAKE POPULAR SMOG-BUSTING PROGRAM TO THE NEXT LEVEL, WITH FREE RIDES ON TWO DOZEN TRANSIT SYSTEMS

"No fare! Thanks for sparing the air." That's the upbeat message that greeted transit riders throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area during a three-day smog alert in late June. The free-ride promotion proved to be so successful that MTC and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District acted quickly to extend the program beyond the initial scope and essentially double their offer.

Under the original plan announced this past spring, MTC and the Air District committed to providing free transit rides on the first three Spare the Air non-holiday weekdays during the 2006 summer/fall smog season, setting aside \$7.5 million to reimburse the 25 participating transit agencies for lost fares.

The smog season had barely begun when high temperatures and low winds combined to trig-

ger air-quality alerts and free rides on three back-to-back weekdays - on Thursday, June 22, Friday, June 23, and Monday, June 26.

In a departure from past Spare the Air campaigns, the free-ride offer was good throughout the day and into the evening instead of just during the morning commute. The extended hours proved to be just the ticket; compared to typical weekday patterns, nearly a half million additional travelers flocked to the region's buses, trains and ferries, bumping up ridership by about 10 percent across the board over the course of the three-day alert.

While the free-ride promotion had the intended effect of significantly boosting ridership during the midday as well as commute hours, certain hot spots nonetheless experienced exceedances of the federal eight-hour standard for ozone (the main ingredient in smog) during the three-day alert.

"Considering the weather, the region did the best it could," said MTC spokesman Randy Rentschler. "These ridership gains are still very impressive."



At BART stations, signs on fare machines tell riders the good news.

Buoyed by the enthusiastic ridership showing, and determined to ward off further air quality violations, MTC and the Air District scrambled to come up with another \$6 million to fund free transit rides on an additional three Spare the Air days. As it turns out, the two agencies acted just in time for a second series of air alert days that occurred in July. — Brenda Kahn

Subscribe to "AirAlert" e-mail notices at < www.sparetheair.org >.

## **Birthday Party on Wheels for the Interstate Highway System**

Federal, state and local officials gathered at San Francisco's Lincoln Park on a bright morning in mid-June to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Interstate Highway System.

The scenic site has an important place in U.S. transportation history, as the endpoint for the 1919 First Transcontinental Motor Train. The arduous 62-day, 3,250-mile journey by several dozen military vehicles from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco helped forge the vision for a network of modern, uniform highways linking the



country from coast to coast. At the ceremony this June, Lincoln Park again made history, this time as the starting point for a motorcade destined to retrace the route of the 1919 Motor Train, albeit in reverse, and at a speedier pace.

A highlight of the anniversary convoy was a big rig emblazoned with a portrait of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who not only participated in the First Transcontinental Motor Train as a young Army lieutenant colonel, but also — as the nation's 34th president — signed the bill authorizing the National System of Interstate Highways in 1956.

"This act did more to bring Americans together than almost any other law of the last century," U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta told the crowd.

— Brenda Kabn

# Calendar

**MONDAY** AUGUST 14, 2006

TransLink® Operating Group
BART, Main Conference Room, 23rd Floor 300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland

MONDAY AUGUST 28, 2006

TransLink® Management Group SamTrans, 4th Floor Dining Conference Room 1250 San Carlos Avenue, San Carlos

**Note:** Dates, times and locations of MTC meetings may change. Please confirm by calling 510.817.5757

# **Commission Actions**

#### May/June 2006

The MTC-run Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) hopes to convince more motorists to pay their bridge tolls electronically with a series of improvements and incentives detailed in the just-adopted FasTrak® Strategic Plan.

The plan calls for designating more FasTrak®-only lanes at the Carquinez, Dumbarton, Richmond-San Rafael and San Mateo-Hayward bridge toll plazas as well as the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (a total of 10 more lanes will be converted to FasTrak®-only by April 2007); reconfiguring and restriping lanes to better separate FasTrak® users from drivers paying tolls with cash; and establishing a network of retail outlets where drivers can pick up a toll tag.

To make FasTrak® more accessible, the initial prepaid toll balance for customers who open their accounts with a credit card will be reduced to \$25 from the current \$40. For customers who do not use a credit card, the required refundable deposit for a toll tag will be reduced to \$20 from the current \$30.

The strategies are designed to boost the percentage of motorists who pay their tolls electronically to 70 percent during peak commute periods and 50 percent on weekends.

The plan also calls for "open-road tolling" (allowing motorists to pass through the toll facility at highway speeds using their FasTrak® toll tags) at the new Benicia-Martinez Bridge toll plaza when the crossing's second span opens in late 2007. BATA Resolution 69

# In the News

#### MTC Scores State and National Awards

The California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance has recognized MTC, BART and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District with the prestigious "Edmund G. 'Pat' Brown Award" for the agencies' innovative partnership in initiating the Spare the Air free-transit program, which is now in its third year (see adjacent story).

In addition, two MTC initiatives have been honored with national Transportation Planning Excellence Awards: the Transportation 2030 Plan as well as the Transit-Oriented Development Policy for Regional Transit Extensions. The awards program is sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration together with the American Planning Association.

# Participants in Bike to Work Day 2006 and Team Bike Challenge Discover the Joys and Benefits of Cycling















More than 50,000 commuters pedaled to work on Bike to Work Day, according to MTC and the Bay Area Bicycle Coalition, which sponsored the May 18 regionwide event. Business was brisk at the region's more than 170 "energizer stations," where passing cyclists could refuel with drinks and breakfast treats, and pick up bicycle messenger bags stuffed with freebies. Even San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom (third photo from right) heeded the call, bicycling from the Ferry Building to his office at City Hall.

And after Bike to Work Day had come and gone, a core group of dedicated bicyclists kept on pedaling in an effort to win the Team Bike Challenge. Best described as a cross between "Survivor" and the "Tour de France," this monthlong Bay Area-wide contest sparked fierce, good-natured competition as 109 five-member teams across all nine counties bicycled to and from work and errands in an effort to log the most points. Teams earned bonus points by including novices or "Big Wheelers" (corporate executives, elected officials, celebrities and the like) on their roster.

The winning team was the "Critical Macs" of MacDonald Architects in San Francisco (second photo from right), whose 253 points earned them a bicycle rack to be placed in a public location of their choosing, along with a plaque. Their key to success? In the words of the team leader, architect Edward Pais, "obsessiveness."

"We checked our score every day to make sure we were still in the lead," he said. — Brenda Kabn

# Facts & Figures Traffic Slows Down as the Bay Area Economy Speeds Up

If your drive to work seems to be taking longer than it did a couple years ago, it's no illusion. Fueled in part by an expansion of the regional economy, commute congestion on Bay Area freeways increased last year at the fastest

rate since 2000, according to data released by MTC in conjunction with Caltrans.

The daily number of vehicle hours of delay due to commute congestion in the nine-county region rose by 9 percent in 2005, following a modest 2 percent bump in 2004 and steady declines in congestion from 2001 through 2003.

Among the list of "Top 10 Bay Area Traffic Hot Spots," the morning commute along westbound Interstate 80 from Hercules to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge retained its seemingly perennial hold on the top spot in 2005. In fact, the Bay Bridge and its approaches accounted for three of the Bay Area's 10 worst congestion locations for the second year in

a row, including the eastbound afternoon commute across the span (number 10) and the afternoon approach on eastbound Interstate 80 and U.S. 101 in San Francisco (number 4).

Nine of the "Top 10" most congested freeway segments shared the same dubious distinction in 2004, although their rankings have been shuffled somewhat. The only newcomer to the list is the eastbound afternoon commute along State Route 4 from Bailey Road in Pittsburg to the A Street/Lone Tree Way exit in Antioch.

Vehicles typically spent about 135,700 hours a day in commute congestion on Bay Area freeways in 2005. While this marks a 9 percent increase over 2004 figures, it remains well below the 177,600 hours per day recorded in 2000 at the height of the region's technology-charged economic boom.

At the county level, the biggest overall increase in freeway congestion in 2005 occurred in Contra Costa County, while Sonoma and Marin counties logged the largest percentage increases.

- John Goodwin

#### **Top 10 Bay Area Traffic Hot Spots** Ranking of Commute-Period Bottlenecks Along Freeways, 2005 (Number 1 indicates the most congested freeway)

2005 Rank	Location (numbers correspond to map)	2005 Daily (Weekday) Vehicle Hours of Delay	2004 Rank
1	Interstate 80, westbound, a.m. — Alameda/Contra Costa Co State Route 4 to Bay Bridge metering lights	unty 10,930	1
2	Interstate 580, eastbound, p.m. — Alameda County Interstate 680 to east of El Charro Road	6,100	3
3	Interstate 580, westbound, a.m. — Alameda County West of North Flynn Road to Airway Boulevard	5,830	2
4	U.S. 101, northbound and Interstate 80, eastbound, p.m. — 9 U.S. 101 from Alemany Boulevard to I-80; I-80 from U.S. 101 to Sterling Street on-ramp	San Francisco 5,140	4
5	<b>U.S. 101, southbound, a.m.</b> — Marin County South of Route 37 to Interstate 580	4,490	7
6	Route 4, westbound, a.m. — Contra Costa County A Street/Lone Tree Way to west of Loveridge Road	4,000	6
7	Route 92, eastbound, p.m. — Alameda County Clawiter Road to Interstate 880 interchange	3,880	5
8	Route 4, eastbound, p.m. — Contra Costa County West of Bailey Road to A Street/Lone Tree Way	3,780	13
9	<b>U.S. 101, northbound, p.m.</b> — Marin County North of Marin City to Central San Rafael	3,690	8
10	Interstate 80, eastbound, p.m. — San Francisco/Alameda Co Yerba Buena Island to Emeryville	ounty 3,120	10

Notes: Rankings are for routes in which continuous stop-and-go conditions occur with few, if any, breaks in the queue. Thus, corridors that have equally severe delays, but where congestion is broken into several segments, may rank lower in this type of congestion listing. Congestion is defined as average speeds below 35 miles per hour for 15 minutes or more. **Source:** MTC, Caltrans District 4

For a chart of daily freeway delay by county, go to <www.mtc.ca.gov/news/press\_releases/rel365.htm>.

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